

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL
234
REPORT ON
SCHOOL DISTRICT PURCHASING
PROCEDURES OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
OCTOBER 1974

Joint Legislative Audit Committee

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October 8, 1974

The Honorable Speaker of the Assembly
The Honorable President of the Senate
The Honorable Members of the Senate and the
Assembly of the Legislature of California

Members:

Transmitted herewith is the Auditor General's report pertaining to the purchasing procedures for instructional materials at 273 school districts.

The legislative intent of the California Instructional Materials Law is to establish broad minimum standards for the selection of instructional materials and to increase the choice of instructional materials that school districts can utilize for classroom instruction.

Pursuant to the Education Code, school districts are required to purchase a minimum prescribed amount of each part of an instructional materials system unless they can certify that such parts are already on hand. The purchase of all parts of the system relating to elementary science study is not necessary to produce the specific learning results intended.

As a result, a few school districts have purchased relatively minor amounts of elementary science materials which they did not need.

In addition to being required to purchase materials not needed, the Education Code requires school districts to purchase all parts of an instructional material system through the Department of Education, if such materials are not on hand, even though such materials may be otherwise available at lower costs or at no cost through donations. This requirement is clearly uneconomical.

The Honorable Members of the Legislature
of California
October 8, 1974
Page 2

The Auditor General has concluded that, despite the relatively minor dollar significance, a requirement to purchase unneeded materials is not prudent. Further, he has concluded that a requirement to purchase materials from the Department of Education, despite the availability of alternative sources, is uneconomical.

The Auditor General has recommended that the Education Code be amended to allow school districts to purchase only those instructional materials which are needed for the education of their students and to allow school districts to obtain such materials in the most economical manner. The implementation of this recommendation will result in a reduction of an undetermined amount of unnecessary educational costs.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Vincent Thomas", written in dark ink.

VINCENT THOMAS, Chairman
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
SUMMARY OF FINDING, RECOMMENDATION AND BENEFITS	1
INTRODUCTION	2
FINDING	
School districts are required to purchase instructional materials through the Department of Education which are unneeded and uneconomical, causing an undetermined amount of unnecessary costs.	4
COMMENTS OF THE STAFF OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS COMMISSION	8

SUMMARY OF FINDING,
RECOMMENDATION AND BENEFITS

Page

FINDING

School districts are required to purchase instructional materials through the Department of Education which are unneeded and uneconomical, causing an undetermined amount of unnecessary costs.

4

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Education Code be amended to allow school districts to purchase only those instructional materials which are needed for the education of their students and to allow school districts to obtain such materials in the most economical manner.

7

BENEFITS

Implementation of this recommendation will result in a reduction of an undetermined amount of unnecessary educational costs.

7

INTRODUCTION

In response to a legislative request, we have reviewed school district purchasing procedures for instructional materials approved by the State Board of Education. Our review included the purchase orders for instructional materials of the 273 school districts in Alameda, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Orange, Placer, Sonoma, and Tulare Counties.

As a result of the concern expressed by officials of many school districts and others over the limited choice of materials the state allowed the school districts to utilize for classroom instruction, the State Department of Education undertook a two year textbook utilization study in 1970.

At the conclusion of the study in 1972, the California Instructional Materials Law was enacted to resolve many of the problems related to availability and procurement of instructional materials, including textbooks.

The legislative intent of the California Instructional Materials Law is to establish broad minimum standards for the selection of instructional materials and increase the choice of instructional materials the school districts could utilize for classroom instruction.

The California Instructional Material Law requires the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission to recommend, to the State

Board of Education, a list of textbooks and instructional materials which, upon adoption by the board, are, to all intents and purposes, the only instructional materials which school districts may purchase with state funds made available for instructional materials.

The State Board of Education determines which textbooks and related instructional materials are to be adopted. However, in its determination as to which materials will be adopted, the board gives full consideration to the recommendations made by the commission.

The first instructional materials adopted under this procedure were in the subjects of science, health, and music.

School districts began to purchase the materials so approved in the spring of 1973. The materials selected are presently being used in the schools.

FINDING

SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE REQUIRED TO
PURCHASE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WHICH ARE UNNEEDED AND UNECONOMICAL,
CAUSING AN UNDETERMINED AMOUNT OF
UNNECESSARY COSTS.

The Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission has the responsibility to recommend to the State Board of Education instructional materials for adoption by the board, in order that such materials can be used by school districts for grades kindergarten through eight.

Section 9400 of the Education Code provides that the State Board of Education may adopt either "instructional materials", "instructional material systems", "instructional material sets", or a combination of these classifications of instructional materials. The State Board is restricted to the adoption of no more than two "instructional material sets" per subject.

The statutory difference between an instructional material "system" and a "set" is that all parts of an instructional material "system" are necessary to produce the specific learning results intended. On the other hand, materials classified as a "set" means that a collection of related materials are so designed that each part of the "set" is related to the same general subject, but not all parts are necessary to produce a specific learning result.

Section 9461 of the Education Code provides that school districts are not required to purchase all materials in a "set". School districts are, however, required by this section to purchase a minimum prescribed amount of each part of a "system" unless they can certify that such parts are already on hand.

The commission arbitrarily grouped 54 elementary science study (ESS) units into 22 instructional material "systems".

The chairman of the science committee, a member of the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, advised us that he could not, nor could any one else on the commission, defend the arbitrary grouping of the 54 ESS units into the 22 "systems" since in his judgment not all of the parts within each of the 22 "systems" are necessary to produce specific learning results intended, a judgment in which we concur.

Since a school district is required to purchase a minimum prescribed amount of a "system", and since all parts of a "system" are not necessary to produce a specific result intended, the effect of the arbitrary classification of the 54 ESS units into 22 "systems" is that some districts are required to purchase materials that they do not need to achieve specific learning results.

Our review of purchase orders for instructional material "systems" on file with the Department of Education for 273 public school districts shows that a few of these 273 school districts, which represent about 27 percent of all public school districts, have purchased relatively minor

amounts of elementary science materials they did not need. A projection as to the total expenditure for materials not needed on a statewide basis cannot be determined. We estimate, however, on the basis of our sample, that such statewide figures would also be relatively minor.

In addition to being required to purchase materials not needed, the Education Code requires school districts to purchase all parts of a "system" through the Department of Education, if such materials are not on hand, even though such materials may be otherwise available at less or no cost. This requirement is clearly uneconomical.

In fact, the publisher which developed the ESS units stated that school districts could save up to 50 percent of the cost of some of the ESS materials by purchasing them from local stores, or obtaining substitute materials from homes, or both.

However, school districts are precluded from obtaining or purchasing ESS materials by such economical methods, or by other economical methods, such as donations from business.

We conclude that despite the relatively minor dollar significance, a requirement to purchase unneeded materials is not prudent. We further conclude that a requirement to purchase materials through the Department of Education, despite the availability of alternative sources, is uneconomical.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Education Code be amended to allow school districts to purchase only those instructional materials which are needed for the education of their students and to allow school districts to obtain such materials in the most economical manner.

BENEFITS

Implementation of this recommendation will result in a reduction of an undetermined amount of unnecessary educational costs.

COMMENTS OF THE STAFF OF
THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND
SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS COMMISSION

The ESS system was unique and the problems resulting from such uniqueness were mechanical which can only be cured by legislation.



Harvey M. Rose
Auditor General

Date: October 4, 1974

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